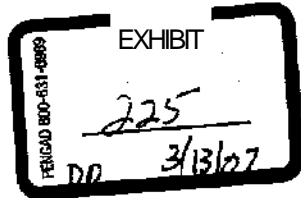


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COMPANION OF SUSPECT IN GIRL'S DEATH IS SOUGHT

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Last Friday, while homicide detectives in Boston were looking for Shawn Drumgold for questioning in the murder of an 11-year-old girl, Drumgold and a buddy were in a New York City apartment attending a birthday party for Drumgold's 3-year-old son.

Yesterday, Boston police, having charged Drumgold with being one of the men who fired into a crowd of young people in Roxbury on Aug. 19, killing Darlene Tiffany Moore, again were scouring the city, this time looking for Drumgold's companion, who, they believe, may hold the key to the identity of the second masked man involved in the shooting. For police, Drumgold's companion, whose street name is Country, may be that second man, or know who the second man is.

For Drumgold, who is being held in the Charles Street Jail in lieu of \$250,000 bail after being charged with Moore's murder Monday, Country may be his alibi.

During a telephone interview yesterday, Rhonda Hamilton, the mother of two of Drumgold's three children, said Drumgold and Country showed up last Friday at the apartment she shares with her mother and returned to Boston Saturday. Hamilton, 19, said it was the first time she had seen Drumgold in two years.

Her mother, Kandi Hamilton, said both Drumgold and his companion were carrying handguns when they arrived.

"I made him take that gun, whatever he had, and put it out," said Kandi Hamilton, who uses a wheelchair.

Rhonda Hamilton and her mother painted an unflattering portrait of Drumgold, saying he had led Rhonda down a wayward path, introducing her to drugs, occasionally beating her and turning his back on his children. They described a young man who had become caught up in a milieu that glorified the violence and lawlessness surrounding the inner-city drug trade.

"He's not a bad person," said Rhonda Hamilton, who works in a Harlem day-care center. "He has a lot of family problems. It just shows how bad drugs are. It broke up my family life, and it's destroyed his. His little daughter, Rashawna, she's 5, and she says she'll always love him, no matter what."

Rhonda Hamilton said she was once arrested with Drumgold and once saw him get shot. But now, she said, she no longer takes drugs.

She said Drumgold and Country made references to the Moore shooting during their visit and that Country had recently suffered a gunshot wound to the leg. Country had recently suffered a gunshot wound to the leg.

Police say Moore was killed when she was struck by gunfire meant for some young men who were among the estimated "15 people gathered on the corner of Homestead Street and Humboldt Avenue.

Police believe the shooting, part of a dispute between rival gangs of young men who call themselves Castlegates and Humboldts, was done in retaliation, either for a drug ripoff or the recent stabbing or shooting of a Castlegate member. The loosely organized gangs take their names from Roxbury streets.

Boston police yesterday acknowledged they were investigating whether Country's gunshot wound is connected to the killing.

Steven J. Rappaport, Drumgold's attorney, also said that he hopes to take a statement from Country. Rappaport said Drumgold is a "convenient scapegoat," someone with a long record whose arrest would silence public outcry over the little girl's murder. Rappaport said he was aware of his client's trip to New York last week, and suggested Drumgold's return to Boston "was the act of an innocent man, not a guilty man."

Rappaport, who instructed Drumgold's family not to speak to reporters, also dismissed the Hamiltons' criticism of Drumgold.

"If he's such a bad guy, why did he go all the way down to his kid's birthday party?" Rappaport asked.

The Hamiltons, however, describe a man who was in jail when his son was born, who has never paid child support, and who has wasted his life on drugs. Drumgold also has an infant daughter by a Roxbury woman, who was in the courtroom with Drumgold's family Monday, and whom Rappaport described as "standing by her man."

Kandi Hamilton said her daughter was 12 and attending school in the Metco program when Drumgold met her at the bus stop,

"The Metco kids have to be at the bus stop at 6:30 and I'm asking her how could you meet anyone at that time," she said. "Turns out, he was coming in after being out all night, selling drugs."

Rhonda Hamilton said she knew Drumgold was involved in drugs but became his girlfriend anyway, bearing his child at 15. "He's very persuasive," she said. "He can make you believe him."

She said Drumgold never held a legitimate full-time job, but instead drifted around Roxbury selling drugs. Despite his constant dealing, however, she said he never made much money. She said he sold heroin for the Apple Gang, a New York-based group of drug peddlers who were at the center of gang violence that left at least a dozen dead in Boston several years ago.

During his arraignment Monday, a prosecutor described several of Drumgold's prior arrests, most of which were for selling drugs. He had been arrested for selling heroin in the Orchard Park housing project early Sunday -- just a few hours after he returned from New York - and was being arraigned on those charges Monday when he was charged with Moore's murder.

Rhonda Hamilton also said she had been with Drumgold when he was shot in the arm in 1984, and when he was shot in the stomach on Blue Hill Avenue in 1986. Rather than steer him away from the drug business, she said the shootings held a peculiar allure.

"He likes to shoot up people; he likes to get shot at," Rhonda said. "It's a big deal."

Rhonda said that two years ago, after Drumgold allegedly broke her arm during an argument, then pulled a gun on her and locked her out of the Seaver (Street apartment they were sharing, she moved out and went to New York to live with her mother.

She said she got a high school equivalency degree. "I've got my life together. I'm moving on, but it seems like Shawn is stuck in the same thing he's been doing for years," she said. "It's sad."

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